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## The student – evaluator of the teacher. A case study in the University of Ploiesti, Romania

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### Abstract

**Problem Statement:** Within the context of searching the best ways of improving quality of the academic system by the administrators of higher education, teachers' evaluation by the students has also started being used in our university yearly.

**Purpose of Study:** The present paper aims at studying the University of Ploiesti academic staff's attitude towards the introduction of such an evaluation method of their activity and its effects (motivating or not/even inhibitory sometimes) on the teaching/learning process and the students themselves.

**Research Methods:** The method used was the survey based on a questionnaire. It was administered to 135 teachers working for the University of Ploiesti in various faculties: technical, economic sciences and social sciences and humanities.

**Findings:** We identified the main teaching staff's attitudes towards the introduction of such an evaluation method in their teaching activity and we delimited its effect on the teachers' motivation to increase the quality of their professional skills, thus obtaining the consequences of applying such a method on the relation between academic teaching staff and students.

**Conclusions:** We identified the main teaching staff's attitudes towards the introduction of such an evaluation method in their teaching activity and we delimited its effect on the teachers' motivation to increase the quality of their professional skills, thus obtaining the consequences of applying such a method on the relation between academic teaching staff and students.

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**Keywords:** evaluation, academic teaching staff, students

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### 1. Introduction

The latest economic, financial, social, political, cultural changes and challenges require constant and urgent concerns related to quality assurance of the educational services. Quality assurance has become a priority since 2000, when, in March 2000, in Lisbon, the European Council established a 10-year development strategy, whose main objective is to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic economy in the world, based on innovation and research. The strategy stage transposition by the member states is yearly analysed within the spring boards (Holban, Wiener, *coord.*, 2005, p. 8; p. 64).

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Given such a context, special mention should be made of the fact that the term quality should not be understood in an absolutist manner, according to which it would represent “what we admire at everybody around us, what we all want, but only few can afford” (Iosifescu, 2008, p. 16). Quality can reach different levels depending on the degree of standards achievement.

Quality Management is associated, most of the times, with ISO 9000: 2000, a set of quality management standards established by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) and, at the same time, a framework for QMS (Quality Management System). According to ISO, quality assurance is an intrinsic part of quality management, focusing on providing confidence that the quality requirements will be achieved at all costs.

Obviously, when we discuss about education, we cannot speak of “quality of education in itself, but we should take into consideration the values promoted by the society, these values depending on a variety of contextual and situational factors incorporated in well-articulated educational policies and strategies” (Iosifescu, *coord.*, 2005, p. 2). Consequently, it is quite difficult to define quality in education in Europe, as it relates to the values promoted by a certain society (with its beliefs, traditions, social perception, specific historic background); more than that, the European space itself is characterized by permanent dynamism (which seems to be more and more accelerated), generated by economic and financial processes, fluctuations in the labour market, and the migration phenomenon.

However, relatively recent studies have been able to dissociate a few common values and standards which have been agreed on by all European partners, although a unique, uniform, free of differences and/or particularities culture cannot be taken into consideration. Therefore, the identified values may be thought of as benchmarks in the formation of the international dimension of education (acc. to CIDREE, Consortium of institutions for Development and Research in education in Europe):

“•independence of thought;

• respect for our fellows;

• • honour and respect for justice and for the others’ rights;

• respect for ways of life, opinions and ideas different from ours, if they, in turn, respect others’;

• decency;

• commitment in promoting democratic processes;

• concern for our own, others’ and the society’s well-being, other persons and of the company”.

In 2007, the European Parliament and the Council of the E.U. launched the recommendation on the establishment of EQARF – European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in Education and Vocational Training. It includes:

“• a model based on *the circle quality* intended to facilitate a systematic approach on the establishment, implementation, evaluation and improvement, at all levels, of the Education and Vocational Training objectives, by specific criteria and descriptors;

• a system for monitoring the results of the education and vocational training system evaluation and revision, including the use of some mechanisms of internal/external evaluation;

• a measuring instrument, by using a set of quality indicators of reference, to facilitate the evaluation and improvement of Education and Vocational Training systems, as well as the establishment of the involvement of all Member States and interested Parties” (IRECE, 2008, p. 9)

As member of the EU, our country has also established principles of national policy for quality assurance in education across the entire national system. In full accordance with the model of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in Education and Vocational Training (EQARF) operates the National Quality Assurance Framework in Education and Vocational Training (CNAC) which meets the European requirements and is consistent with the European level best practices. In this context, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) was also set up, whose mission is to perform external assessment of the quality of the education offered by higher education institutions in Romania, aiming at:

• contributing to the development of an institutional culture based on higher education quality;

• ensuring the protection of the direct beneficiaries of higher education study programmes, by the production and dissemination of coherent and credible, publicly accessible information on the quality of education;

• proposing to the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation strategies and policies of continuous improvement in the higher education quality, in close connection with the pre-academic education. ([www.aracis.ro](http://www.aracis.ro))

As part of the Romanian academic education system, Petroleum – Gas University Ploiești (PGU) integrated in its educational policy requirements the criteria and the quality standards required by ARACIS. In *The Policy in the Field of Quality*, PGU mobilizes its entire staff to grant high attention to the quality of the services they provide.” ([www.upg-ploiesti.ro](http://www.upg-ploiesti.ro)).

Among the objectives of quality management within our university one can also notice the academic teaching staff life-long learning. The performance indicator related to this objective is represented by the reports on the academic staff's evaluation by the students. ([www.upg-ploiesti.ro](http://www.upg-ploiesti.ro))

Being a relatively new requirement in our educational space, our purpose was to investigate PGU teaching staff's attitudes towards the introduction of such methods in the annual assessment of their work, its effect (motivating, demotivating/ inhibitory or neutral) on improving their activity, its consequences on the teacher - student relationship dynamics.

## 2. Methodology of research

### 2.1. Participants in the study

The participants in the study were 135 teachers from PGU, working within the three main strands of specialisation of the university that is technical strand, economic sciences strand and social sciences and humanities strand, holding different positions within their departments. Out of the 135 questionnaires that we administered, the information from only 128 was processed, as the 7 of them were incomplete.

The distribution of the participants is shown in the table below:

Table 1. Respondents' distribution according to position and strand

		<i>Junior lecturer</i>	<i>Senior lecturer</i>	<i>Assoc. prof.</i>	<i>Prof.</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Technical</i>	no.	2	18	22	8	50
	%	4.00%	36.00%	44.00%	16.00%	39.06%
<i>Economic Sciences</i>	no.	9	24	6	3	42
	%	21.43%	57.14%	14.29%	7.14%	32.81%
<i>Social sciences and humanities</i>	no.	15	15	3	3	36
	%	41.67%	41.67%	8.33%	8.33%	28.13%
<i>Total number of respondents</i>						128

As seen from the table above, the highest rate was obtained by technical teaching staff (39.06%), followed by teachers working in the Economy faculty (32.81%) and social sciences and humanities faculty (28.13%). This distribution of the respondents can be explained by the fact that our university has had a long tradition in the technical fields (PGU has originally had only technical faculties, providing instruction in the oil industry), while the other two strands were set up beginning with the '90s.

### 2.2. Research instrument

Our research instrument was a questionnaire, whose items were mainly developed by us, while other were taken from the Quality Barometer published by ARACIS in 2010, which makes a thorough description of the higher education system in Romania.

The questionnaire consisted in 10 questions the respondents had to answer, but the present research provides the analysis and interpretation of the first 7 questions. For each item included in the survey, we calculated the percentage rate for each item included in the questions.

## 3. Data Analysis and Results

The table below shows the results of our research synthetically:

Table 2. Research Results

		<i>Technical</i>		<i>Economic Sciences</i>		<i>Social sciences and humanities</i>	
		No	%	No	%	no	%
Q1	I1	32	64.00%	24	57.14%	18	50.00%
	I2	14	28.00%	9	21.43%	6	16.67%
	I3	0	0.00%	3	7.14%	3	8.33%
	I4	2	4.00%	3	7.14%	3	8.33%
	I5	2	4.00%	3	7.14%	6	16.67%
Q2	I1	34	68.00%	21	50.00%	15	41.67%
	I2	8	16.00%	9	21.43%	6	16.67%
	I3	0	0.00%	6	14.29%	6	16.67%
	I4	4	8.00%	6	14.29%	6	16.67%
	I5	4	8.00%	0	0.00%	3	8.33%
Q3	I1	6	12.00%	15	35.71%	9	25.00%
	I2	36	72.00%	18	42.86%	18	50.00%
	I3	4	8.00%	3	7.14%	3	8.33%
	I4	2	4.00%	3	7.14%	0	0.00%
	I5	2	4.00%	3	7.14%	6	16.67%
Q4	I1	2	4.00%	18	42.86%	9	25.00%
	I2	22	44.00%	12	28.57%	15	41.67%
	I3	14	28.00%	9	21.43%	6	16.67%
	I4	12	24.00%	3	7.14%	6	16.67%
Q5	I1	10	20.00%	9	21.43%	9	25.00%
	I2	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	3	8.33%
	I3	8	16.00%	6	14.29%	9	25.00%
	I4	2	4.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	I5	0	0.00%	9	21.43%	6	16.67%
	I6	28	56.00%	15	35.71%	6	16.67%
	I7	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	3	8.33%
	I8	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	I9	2	4.00%	3	7.14%	0	0.00%
Q6	I1	24	48.00%	15	35.71%	6	16.67%
	I2	4	8.00%	3	7.14%	0	0.00%
	I3	0	0.00%	3	7.14%	9	25.00%
	I4	2	4.00%	6	14.29%	0	0.00%
	I5	14	28.00%	9	21.43%	9	25.00%
	I6	0	0.00%	3	7.14%	6	16.67%
	I7	4	8.00%	0	0.00%	6	16.67%
	I8	2	4.00%	3	7.14%	0	0.00%
Q7	I1	12	24.00%	6	14.29%	6	16.67%
	I2	18	36.00%	9	21.43%	3	8.33%
	I3	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	I4	6	12.00%	12	28.57%	6	16.67%
	I5	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	3	8.33%
	I6	2	4.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	I7	2	4.00%	9	21.43%	3	8.33%
	I8	4	8.00%	0	0.00%	12	33.33%
	I9	6	12.00%	6	14.29%	3	8.33%

A first problem aimed at by our research was the way this relatively new practice (introduced since our institution has started being organised and functioning in accordance with the quality management system) is perceived by the teaching staff in our university.

As the data show, (Q1, I1) more than half of the respondents see this it as *welcome* (64.00% in technical faculties, 57.14% in Economic Sciences Faculty and 50.00% in Social Sciences and Humanities). Also, it is worth noticing that, an important proportion of subjects consider such type of evaluation *risky* (Q1, I2), especially respondents belonging to technical faculties (28.00%) and to economic sciences (21.43%). Against this background, we can state that there are very few teachers who *reject* this quality management instrument and who have not formulated a point of view yet (the percentages are between 4.00% and 8.33%); therefore, they don't have a clear position. (Q1, I3, I4).

In terms of the need to introduce such an evidence for improving higher education system quality (Q2), similar to the previous item, most of the subjects considered it (Q2, I1) *very necessary* (68.00 % in technical faculties, 50.00% in Economy faculties and 41.67 % in Social Sciences and Humanities faculty). It is quite obvious, though, that we are facing a cautious agreement (Q2, I2,3), as some of the teachers consider it as *not being necessary* (16.00% of the respondents from technical sciences, 21.43% of the respondents from economic sciences, 16.67% of the respondents from social sciences and humanities), while others even *useless* (14.29% of the economic sciences teaching staff, respectively 16.67% of the humanities teaching staff). We can also add here the number of non-responses, which summed up (38.95%), show a certain reserve on the introduction of the teachers' evaluation by the students in the process of professional and teaching training (Q2, I4) as well as of the learning-teaching activity improvement.

This prudence/reserve is also clear when it comes to using the evaluation done by students in the academic staff's teaching activity. Analysing the data (Q3, I2), we noticed that this practice only helps most of the respondents to a *certain extent* (the technical faculties 72.00 %, economic sciences 43.00 %, and social sciences and humanities 50.00 %) not to a *great extent* (Q3, I3) (as only 12% of the respondents from technical faculties considered, 35.71% of the economic sciences' respondents and a quarter of the social sciences and humanities).

The answers concerned with the relation between self-evaluations and the evaluation done by students brought to light and interesting and complex issue (Q4). This is due to the fact that, once this practice introduced, the teacher's self-evaluation (more or less systematic, explicit, constant and relevant for the teacher him/herself) is no longer sovereign (self-sufficient and showing everything connected with teaching methods and techniques). In our opinion this represents the most accurate part of the research, showing the most balanced respondents' options. Self-evaluation is now forced to enter a relation with a professional and relational evaluation formula, the external and institutional one. As the table above shows, (Q4, I1), we can notice that for 42.86 % of the economic sciences respondents, students' evaluation (external evaluation) is more important than self-evaluation (internal evaluation), marked by only 25.00% of the social sciences and humanities respondents. As far as the teaching staff of the technical faculties is concerned (Q4, I2), self-evaluation is more important (44.00%) than for those from the social sciences and humanities (41.67%).

From the data obtained, it is clear that the respondents from technical faculties grant a minor importance to students' evaluation (only 4.00 %), which would contradict their answers to the previous questions (evaluation was marked as *welcome and necessary*).

Worthy of pointing out is the finding according to which many subjects still have not formulated a clear point related to the relation between self-evaluation and the evaluation done by students (Q4, I3): 28.00% of the economic sciences teaching staff and 21.43 % of the social sciences and humanities teaching staff. This shows, in our opinion, that some of the respondents, either have not considered the self-evaluation, or have not come to a clear conclusion yet.

However, when you look at the data related to the university teaching staff's opinion on the effects of their evaluation by the students (Q5), a certain direction seems to exist. It was noticed that between one-fifth (subjects from technical faculties: 20.00 %; subjects from economic sciences: 21.43 %) and one-quarter (subjects from the social sciences and humanities faculty: 25.00 %) are sure that these effects will be will be stimulating (Q5, I1). The other respondents' options are divided as follows: those from social sciences and humanities faculty allocated another quarter of the percentage rate (25.00 %) to a more severe self-control and those from the economic sciences allocated 21.43 % to the trend towards a *more indulgent attitude* (Q5, I5); the subjects from technical faculties had a distinct opinion, considering that the main effect of their evaluation by students is (Q5, I6) a *greater attention to students' reaction* (56.00%). This opinion was also stated by 37.71 % the respondents belonging to the economic sciences strand.



We can't move further in our analysis without mentioning the fact according to which the surveyed teaching staff do not perceive this practice as leading to a more authoritarian attitude towards students. Their opinion on this issue can also be seen in Table 2, Q5, I4. It seems that they are aware of the fact that not emphasizing an authoritarian attitude would be in their favour when it comes to being evaluated by their own students. In the teachers' perception, it is not the increase in authority that would be likely to have positive effects on the students' judgment.

We could also observe that for subjects of the social sciences and humanities faculties, the effect of the evaluation done by students is *a greater attention to the students' reaction*, at the rate of only 16.67 %, (Q5, I7) which correlates with *a more severe self-control* (Q5, I3). This could reveal the fact that the teachers of the social sciences and humanities faculty place great emphasis on self-training for reaching perfectionism rather than on increasing the degree of dependence on the students' reaction (and, therefore, a stronger and more stable feeling of professional responsibility).

Regarding the effects the evaluation done by the students on the students themselves (Q6) as perceived by the respondents, most of them tend to believe that this practice will make students become more responsible (Q6, I1): 48.00% of the subjects from technical faculties, 35.71% of subjects from economic sciences and only 16.67 % of the respondents from social sciences and humanities. Special mention should be made of the fact that a quarter of the respondents from social sciences and humanities (25.00 %) see in this practice the *effect of the teachers' the control* (Q6, I3), and another quarter believe that this will produce *a closer involvement of student* (Q6, I5) in the educational process. The respondents do not mention the effect of students' revenge or indifference. (Q6, I2, I6).

After analysing the effects of teachers' evaluation by students on students themselves according to the participants' point of view, we also considered necessary looking at its effects on the teacher – student relationship. (Q7). More than a third of the teachers of the technical faculties (36.00 %) believe that this will result in some kind of *closeness* (Q7, I2) between them and their students (that the distance will decrease), and almost a quarter (24.00 %) consider that this will lead to an increasing confidence. The teachers of the Faculty of Economic Sciences tend to believe that the effect of such type of evaluation will be an *increasing tension, without conflict generating elements* (Q7, I4), 28.57% and *suspicion* (Q7, I7), 21.43 %. There are also teachers in this faculty who appreciate that the effect might be *a closer relationship* (Q7, I2) between them and their students as a result of such a practice (21.42 %). As far as the subjects of the social sciences and humanities strand are concerned, most of the answers indicate the option *'I don't know'*, 33.73%, (Q7, I8), while other options are distributed almost evenly, showing indeed the fact that teachers within this strand do not yet have a clear perception (Q7, I9), an idea concerning the effects of teachers' evaluation by students regarding the relationship between them and their trainees.

However, looking all the three categories of respondents' options, we notice that the *relationship does not become colder*, either because there is no relationship to get colder (as it has not been emotionally cold so far), or because this is not a result of such type of evaluation. Teachers' evaluation by the students will definitely not lead to fear in the relationships between the participants in the educational activity.

#### 4. Conclusions

Quality in education is an actual problem in both European and Romanian higher education, which, beginning with 2000, has become a priority. Along with other requirements, an important related aspect to the quality of the teaching staff's work is to be evaluated by the students. The results of this practice should be neither seen as absolute, nor neglected.

Our research – which might be considered a pilot research that will be further developed – showed that most of the surveyed teaching staff believe that the introduction of such practice in evaluating their dynamics work is necessary and welcome. There are, however, subjects who claim a certain reserve (expressed by some as risky, and by others, by the fact that they have not formulated a point of view yet).

Most of the teachers involved in academic research state that, once part of our teaching activity, students will be responsible and will not take the opportunity to revenge on or blackmail their teachers as part of the evaluation process; moreover, they will get involved in educational activity more and more carefully.

The relationship between teacher and student – according to most of the surveyed subjects – will become closer, based on trust, with slight notes of tension, but without conflict generating elements. The academic staff are interested in this (new) evaluative practice, in how it is applied and in how it works. It has become part of their professional life and it affects their training, communication and the rapport with their students.

Another outcome of our research is the fact that clarifying the relation between teachers' self-evaluation and the evaluation done by students is extremely important, as to establish a clear relation between what the teachers want from themselves (as people with a developed professional and well-done job responsible consciousness) and what the students expect from meeting them. We might also find (in the following stages of our research) the fact that self-evaluation is essential to the scientific, cultural, psychological-pedagogical and axiological teachers' search, while the evaluation done by their students plays an important part in creating concrete and full of meaning situations, variable from one generation to another, from one college to another, which will be essential in meeting the individuals' specific needs and requirements. Actually, we might think of an openness of the self-evaluation criteria towards the quality management criteria in such a way so as to take into account the students' motivation and needs as well, without increasing the red tape in a useless manner.

From the data obtained during our research it appears that respondents from the social sciences and humanities strand show a greater independence to the evaluation done by their students. Those from technical and economic sciences strand of specialisation seem to lay greater emphasis on their students' opinions, considering this one of the distinct moments of quality assurance in higher education.

Certain subjects' answers state that the method could be more effective if the information obtained from students would be known in due time by each teacher who should (self)adjust the teaching methods, attitudes, behaviour and relationship with the students better and continuously. In this way, the students' interest, satisfaction and activism degree would increase.

In short, we are still in the process of clarifying the significance of the teachers' evaluation by the students, as part of the improvement of academic life quality. It is therefore useful that, in the self-evaluation process, academic teaching staff also give great significance to the feedback from their students in order to be as close as possible to their demands, aspirations and expectations.

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